Your Lips in the Streetlights by bleepbloopbee

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“Do you accept?”
“I feel like I’ll be signing up for something horrible if I say yes.”

There’s something about Steve Harrington. He glows like the sun’s bottled up inside him, and his easy confidence draws Jonathan in easily. It’s hard to say no to him.

“How about I call you?”
“You don’t have my number.”
“Yellow pages.”

Jonathan knows that that’s not a bad thing.

1. one look and my heartbeat stops

Notes for the Chapter:

> There. back on track c: I still don't feel 100% about this first chapter, but first chapters are always really difficult.
>
> (chapter title comes from 'Avalanche' by Walk the Moon)

The teacher paces at the front of the classroom, lecturing about World War II.

In the third row, last desk on the left, sat Jonathan Byers. He's barely paying attention.

As the teacher rambles on about America's gleaming victory over the Nazis, glamorizing it to paint the US as the only country able to defeat the Nazis, Jonathan holds back an eyeroll. Each year in high school, he's had the same history teacher. Each year, this rant comes up where the teacher gets deeply patriotic, and *deeply* incorrect.

Jonathan would rather be doing another math class than sit through this rant. The other students feel the same way; hardly any are paying attention and most are zoning out.

Jonathan zones out too, his eyes shifting from the teacher to the window. As it hits November, there are no green leaves left on the trees. They've all turned into brilliant red, rich orange, and sharp yellow leaves. Instead of being in class, Jonathan wishes he were outside, taking pictures of gorgeous nature before the leaves fall to the ground and everything's bare. Those leaves are the last burst of color before winter turns everything grey.

Jonathan prays for the bell to ring to save him from this hell. Maybe the world has decided to be nice today, because as if on cue, the bell rings.

Jonathan jolts at the sound, coming back to reality in time to hear

the teacher rattle off the homework for the weekend. The rest of the class isn't paying attention. They're grabbing their bags and rushing to get out of there. It's finally Friday, and history class is the last place they want to be. Jonathan follows, shoving his notebook in his bag as he stands.

He's relieved that it's the weekend. Since it's Friday, meaning that he'll drive Will over to Mike Wheeler's house, then go run some errands for his mom while he's out. And maybe, if he gets the errands done quick enough, he can take a few photos of the leaves before the sun goes down.

To anyone else, that sounds like a boring afternoon. But to him, it's heaven. Spending the day with his family and taking pictures is the thing he loves the most.

He heads outside, crossing the parking lot to his car. Will's waiting there for him, since the middle school gets out a little bit before the high school does. Will's leaning up against the passenger door, and he perks up when he sees his brother.

"How was school?" Jonathan asks, ruffling Will's hair. Will pulls a face, ducking away. (For a few seconds, Jonathan hopes that Will's not hitting the teenage stage of hating his family… but that only bothers him for a second.)

"It was fine, I guess," Will shrugs.

Jonathan unlocks the car as Will talks, and the two climb in.

"Mike was talking about some new kid." Will says, shutting his door. Jonathan raises an eyebrow.

"Really?"

"Yeah," Will nods. "At the high school. He was saying the guy's a friend of Nancy's. They've known each other since they were kids or something."

Jonathan tries to remember if he saw any new face today, but he can't think of anybody. He would've noticed though. Hawkins was small enough where there were rarely any new kids. Any new face

would've been obvious, and there would've been some big commotion about it.

"Mike doesn't really know him though." Will shrugs.

Jonathan starts the car, glancing at Will.

He doesn't really know the Wheelers all that well. Will's friends hardly ever come over. The Wheeler's have been designated as the usual hangout place, so he's only talked to them when he's gone to pick up Will. He knows Nancy, the eldest Wheeler, is in his grade. She's on track to being valedictorian, but that's just about all he knows. Her circle doesn't really coincide with Jonathan's, so they've maybe said two sentences to each other in years. It helps that Jonathan's social circle is practically nonexistent.

Jonathan nods a few times, unsure of what to say. Will doesn't continue the conversation either. Instead, he leans forward and turns on the radio. Some random rock song starts playing, and Jonathan starts to head towards home.

Jonathan's currently hating the music in the grocery store.

Halloween was literally last week and they're already playing Christmas music. He regrets leaving his Walkman at home. He glances down at the list his mom made, and holds in a sigh.

He had dropped Will off at the Wheeler's a little bit ago, and stopped by the store on the way home. Joyce had left him a list earlier and some cash, telling him she couldn't do it since she was out doing something with Hopper, the town sheriff and recently his mom's new beau. H knew that if he didn't stop by the store after dropping Will off, there was no chance in hell he'd go out again.

Half of the list is checked off, and he's standing in diary trying to find the milk his mom had listed. She put down a specific brand, but

maybe the store was out. Jonathan wasn't sure, but he was sure he was about to lose his patience and give up.

He's two seconds from walking away when someone knocks into him, making him stumble and drop the grocery list. The paper flutters to the floor.

Jonathan turns sharply, expecting to see some jackass from school. An annoyed comeback is already on his lips when he's met with a face he's never seen before.

"Oh shit-- sorry," the stranger curses, taking a step back. "Wasn't paying attention."

Jonathan barely gets a glimpse at the guy before the stranger bends down and grabs the dropped grocery list. The stranger stands, and offers it to him. Then, Jonathan gets a good look at him.

The stranger looks to be his age, with a mass of brown hair and matching eyes. He's a few inches taller, and fair skinned. He lifts his head, and Jonathan's nearly in awe. The guy's fucking gorgeous-- sharp square jaw, enchanting smile, eyes that melt with the smile, and a warm glow to his skin.

The guy laughs a little, and Jonathan awkwardly looks away once he realizes he's staring.

"It's okay," Jonathan says slowly, numbly taking the grocery list. He's kind of at a loss for words.

'I don't think I've ever seen anyone this pretty ,' Jonathan thinks.

"Not good at first impressions, am I?" The guy runs a hand through his hair, and Jonathan nearly drops the basket he's carrying.

"New in town?" Jonathan asks, hoping to god he's good at hiding his awkwardness.

The guy shifts a bit, looking a little puzzled by the question.

"Small town, everyone talks when somebody moves in." Jonathan explains, looking just over the stranger's shoulder. He's scared that if

he looks at the guy's face he'll be caught staring again. He'd rather not be pinned as a freak within seconds of meeting the guy.

"Oh… then yeah," the guy nods. "Steve Harrington."

He holds out a hand, looking confident and natural. It makes Jonathan feel even more awkward. The guy looks so at ease, while just *talking* has got him all pent up. But he was raised with manners dammit, and social anxiety aside, he was going to be welcoming.

He takes the guy's hand and shakes.

"Jonathan Byers."

"Nice to meet you Jonathan," Steve smiles, letting go.

Jonathan cracks a smile without realizing. He nods, returning the nicety. "Nice to meet you too."

They meet eyes. Steve's practically glowing under the fluorescent lights. Jonathan's gut tightens for a second. As soon as it tightened, it loosens when Steve shifts his weight, eyes flicking away for a few seconds.

"I guess I'll see you around then, huh? It's a small town right?" He glances down the aisle, then back at Jonathan, who weakly nods.

"Yeah," he bites at the peeling skin on his lip. Steve waves, then starts to walk off. Jonathan watches him walk down the aisle and disappear down another. When he's out of sight, Jonathan snaps out of it-- shaking his head and looking down at the list in his hand. Honestly, he remembers it falling but he can't remember grabbing it. He was so entranced by the guy's looks...

S he assumes that was the new kid Will was talking about earlier. He can't help but think the guy has to be some kind of *god.* There's no way someone can be that beautiful and pretty much *glow* . Jonathan's a little in awe, but he tries to distract himself by continuing shopping.

Yet Steve's in the back of his mind the whole time.

Steve is very acquainted with the look Jonathan gave him in the store. It's a lovestruck, awed look.

He's been getting that for as long as he can remember; even when he was young. It's a dangerous look, one that can easily be taken too far and grow into an obsession. But at this point he's gotten used to it.

That's what happens when you're blessed with an ethereal beauty. A perk of being a child of the greek goddess of beauty.

2. got my heartbeat racing

Notes for the Chapter:

> the first chapter was pretty much the same as the original, but there's some big changes in this chapter! i feel a lot better about it now :D
>
> (chapter title comes from 'Out of My League' by Fitz and the Tantrums)

They've only been in Hawkins for two days and Steve already doesn't like it. There's nothing to do. At *all.*

Him and his dad just moved from New York City. He thrived in the buzzing city. He blended in with the crowds walking the streets, squished between people as they waited for a subway car to arrive, knew the best hole-in-the-wall diners, and was able to carry a week's worth of groceries five blocks back to their apartment without breaking the bags.

He loved the city, but his dad had popped that fantasy like a bubble when Steve came home from school one day and found his dad putting their belongings in boxes.

Something at work… was all his dad said it. His tone was cryptic. He refused to say anything else on it, and instead told Steve to start packing. Yeah, it sounded real freakin' suspicious, but Steve knew his father. Once his father had his mind set on something, it was impossible to change it.

So they would be moving from the Big Apple to tiny Hawkins, Indiana.

Now, Steve Harrington sat amongst boxes in the living room to their new house. For the same price as a mildly cramped apartment in lower Manhattan, they were able to get the equivalent of a mansion in Hawkins. The place felt too big for just the two of them.

He looks around warily, still not used to the lofty ceiling and silence

from outside. He missed the cramped buildings and ever present sound of cars on the streets below.

The country was too quiet for him.

Steve sighs, sitting back on his heels. He's knelt down, trying to hook the TV up. But it's too confusing since that little instruction booklet got lost in the move. He slowly stands, deciding to give up.

Bored out of his mind, he wandered into the kitchen, and started to poke around. Except, all the cabinets are empty. On the way in, his dad had stopped at the grocery store to pick up a few basics. The 'basics' meaning literally just bread, peanut butter, and beer. (Yeah, real healthy, right?)

Steve stands in front of an empty pantry, and decides it's time to get out of the house.

He hasn't registered for school yet, so he's been cooped up in the house since they got there. He swings the door to the pantry shut, and starts to dig through the mess on the kitchen table to find the car keys. The table's covered in towers of cardboard boxes. They're all heavy as shit-- full of kitchen supplies brought from New York. (Steve thinks that despite all of these boxes, they're still not going to fill all of these cabinets.)

Finally, lodged between a box of glassware and plates, he finds them. *Victory.*

"I'm going to the store!" He yells, shoving his feet into his shoes. He rests a hand on the wall, so he doesn't lose his balance.

In return, he's met with silence.

He knows his dad's home… but maybe he didn't hear him. Or maybe, just didn't care.

His hand falls back to his side after he's got his shoes on. He sighs quietly, and leaves without saying anything else.

Steve also hates the supermarket.

He liked the small, almost hidden Mom-and-Pop markets of the city. A chain-supermarket sits in the middle of Hawkins, with wide aisles and bright lights. It's not *completely* terrible. It's just not what he's used to.

He grabs a cart, and starts to go through each aisle. With a pretty much empty kitchen, there's a lot of stuff that needs to be bought.

And then he runs into Jonathan Byers.

Okay… he's a child of Aphrodite. That's no big deal, right? She's got tons of kids. Steve assumes he's one of hundreds, if not thousands. He's never met any of his siblings (that he knows of), but has met other demigods. That's how he knows Nancy, after all. Childhood penpals are good for something you know. You're young, you'll confide anything to your best friend.

But anyway, maybe his dad tried to be nice, and move close to Nancy. Or maybe it was swear luck. Steve doesn't know if that's apart of Aphrodite's thing or not, but sometimes stuff like that just happens.

Like how he just moved into town, and he's already running into locals in the supermarket and getting stares.

He's used to the stares though, do he's not really surprised by them. It's still a minor annoyance though. He just wishes to have a normal day, but people stare at him because of his mother's beauty. Sometimes, he hopes the glamour will fade as he ages, but he knows that chances are he'll be an eighty year old with glowing skin and no wrinkles.

But he pushes the thoughts out of his mind as he walks out of the store.

Small town high school is also *much* different than high school in New York.

For starters, in New York, the school Steve went to was massive. It was half a dozen floors, crammed in between two apartment buildings. The halls were bustling with students and there was easily one thousand kids in his class.

In Hawkins, there probably isn't one thousand students in all the schools *combined* .

Everything felt spacious. The halls were wide and hardly crowded. People walked leisurely between classes instead of bustling to make it up four flights of stairs.

Steve felt out of place as he stared down at the schedule the lady at the front desk handed him when he introduced himself.

A map of Hawkins High was attached, but it really wasn't necessary. The school was like four hallways, made into a square. It wasn't that hard to figure out.

He glances at his schedule, seeing what his first hour class is.

Oh fuck, it's math.

He sighs, repeating the room number in his head as he walks down the hall.

As he searches for the room, he feels eyes trailing after him. Dread starts to fill his gut.

Thank the gods that Nancy's in his first hour math class. He sees her sitting in the front row the second he enters the classroom. A wave of relief washes over him, and he rushes over to sit next to her. If somebody was already sitting there, oh well. This was a mini crisis here. He's already had two girls flirt with him and he's only been in the school for roughly ten minutes.

"Jesus Nance," he says, exasperated. "The girls are like sharks here."

She laughs a little, glancing up from her notebook.

"There's rarely any new meat, so of course they'd pounce," she jokes. "They can't help but be attracted to your natural beauty."

Steve sticks out his tongue, making her laugh again.

"Is there reverse plastic surgery? Like to make yourself uglier? Steve asks, leaning back in his chair.

"I think your mother would kill you. She'd have a heart attack." Nancy says.

Steve shrugs. "I'm sure one of us has done it."

'Us' as a collective, the collective being all of Aphrodite's children. He likes to think that there's at least one of his half-siblings out there somewhere cursing at their mother for the gift she bestowed on them. Don't get him wrong, sometimes the whole beauty thing is kind of nice… but when he's just trying to get to class? He doesn't want to be flirted with, thanks.

"Maybe she has like… a sense that goes off if a kid's fucking up their body. She appears right before they fuck up." Steve goes on. "I could get face tattoos or something."

Nancy snorts. "Please don't get any face tattoos."

"I don't think I will. I'd hate to see that in the mirror every morning."

Steve shakes his head.

Nancy's about to say something, but the bell interrupts her. Seconds later, the class starts to fill with other students. Steve glances over at Nancy, but she's paying attention to the board already. All the teacher's written is the *date* , and she's already poised to take notes. Steve nearly rolls his eyes, but he decides against it.

Lazily, he pulls out a notebook and tries to pay attention. It's Algebra II, but math isn't his best subject. At least his last school was a little ahead, so he already knows what the teacher's talking about. Now he can zone out in class for a little bit and not miss anything.

A small joy of changing schools (if there are any joys), he likes to think.

The bell for lunch rings, and Jonathan's already exasperated.

The school is filled with this weird energy today as everyone buzzes about the new kid. Sure, Jonathan can understand the excitement of a new student, but this is kind of crazy. Maybe he's not the only one that was a little speechless when he first met Steve Harrington.

Whatever thing Steve has going on that caused that yesterday has sent most of the girls in the school into a tizzy. Like sharks smelling blood in the water.

Jonathan feels kind of bad for Steve. It's bad enough that he's moved to a new town, new school, but then have to deal with horny teenage girls? Terrible.

As he ponders about this, Jonathan walks into the cafeteria, weaving between people to get to his usual table. The table's tucked into the corner of the large room, on the fringes of all of the cliques' tables. He sits alone, either reading or studying while he eats. Sitting alone doesn't really bother him. In elementary school, it definitely did. But

by now, he's grown to like the 30 minute reading time or study time that perfectly fits in the middle of the school day. He can speed through books like this, zoning out his classmates' chatter as he invests himself in whatever novel he's picked up this week.

"Can I sit here?"

He's so immersed in the obscure scifi novel that he jolts and nearly drops it when somebody speaks. Just barely managing to not drop the book into the pile of cold mac-n-cheese, he looks up. He doesn't expect to see Steve Harrington standing in front of him, in all of his near-ethereal glory.

Steve looks just as good as he did in the grocery store. Still practically glowing, despite the unflattering fluorescent lights of the school cafeteria.

"Y-Yeah, sure," he nods, feeling a little awkward. His throat feels thick, and he tries to swallow down his nerves.

Don't you have girls to be flirting with, or something? He thinks. He sticks his bookmark in the book, and sets it down next to the tray. He might as well try to be sociable.

Steve sits down across from him, grimacing at the food on his tray but eating it anyway.

"You could've sat with somebody else," Jonathan says quietly. He didn't really know what else to say, honestly. He knew there were a thousand better options than to sit with him, in the corner.

If the other students caught Steve sitting with him, Jonathan knew that good looks or not, Steve would lose some major popularity points.

Steve looks up from his tray, a little confused. "I don't really know anybody else."

"Oh…" Jonathan bites his bottom lip for a second. "I just… I'm not really good company."

Maybe it's better to not tell Steve about the impending doom that his

social status will face if he keeps sitting here.

Steve seems to find something amusing in that, because he cracks a smile. “You’re fine.”

Jonathan doesn’t really know what to say. He shrugs. “I guess…”

“Do you know Nancy Wheeler?” Steve asks, changing topics without warning.

Jonathan nods. He’s known everybody in this school since he was little.

“She’s a good friend of mine, she’s just not in this lunch though.” Steve says.

“I know.” Jonathan says. A second later he realizes just how creepy that sounds and quickly backtracks to explain. “Her brother’s friends with mine, and they were talking about you.”

Steve raises an eyebrow, leaning forward a bit. “All good things?”

“I don’t know.” Jonathan shrugs. “He just said something about a new kid.”

Steve slowly nods. He leans back, sitting normally. Jonathan doesn’t really know what else to say, so he lets the conversation die.

So far, Steve seems nice. He’d been polite at the grocery store, but now that they’re actually talking that kindness is genuine. He smiles a lot, making the corner of his eyes crinkle and his brown eyes shine.

Jonathan glances up from his tray, watching as Steve runs a hand through his hair. A few strands fall in front of Steve’s eyes, and Jonathan nearly leans forward and brushes them away. But he catches himself, with awkward realization.

That’s… weird, Jonathan thinks, blinking a few times. That was definitely a weird thought.

Steve must’ve noticed, because he looks up too. His smile grows, and Jonathan’s pretty sure he just got caught staring. Steve doesn’t call

him out on it. Instead, he chuckles, and brushes the few strands back.

“So I’m new in town,” he changes topics, to Jonathan’s relief. “What’s there to do in Hawkins?”

He rests his chin on his palm, leaning forward.

“Not much,” Jonathan shrugs. “There’s the movie theatre, the quarry… some lakes…”

Steve raises his eyebrows. “Sounds like an adventure.”

“Not really,” Jonathan snorts. “Compared to New York.”

Steve halfheartedly shrugs. “It’s not that big of a deal when you’re living there…”

There’s something laced in his tone, but Jonathan can’t pick out what it is. But it implies there’s more to the story. He knows not to ask though.

“Hawkins is just about as small-town as you can get.” Jonathan says. “Hardly anything happens here.”

“Is that why I’m such a big deal?” Steve jokes, raising an eyebrow. Jonathan cracks a smile, nodding.

“Well… I’ll find some way to make this place fun.” Steve says, as if he was promising. He continues smiling, picking up a few of the shitty school fries and popping them into his mouth. He purses his lips together in a smile as he chews. Jonathan will admit that it’s a little cute, but he quickly pushes the thought out of his mind and continues to eat his own lunch.

Nancy gives him an unimpressed look from across the table. Steve rolls his eyes, leaning back in the chair.

“I’m trying to help you get caught up.” She sighs, trying to be quiet since they’re in the school library. “The least you could do is pretend to listen.”

Steve tips the chair onto its back two legs, annoying Nancy even more. She’s just trying to help him catch up for gods’ sake. He could humor her at least.

“I’ve never been good at math.” Steve shrugs. “Why bother?”

“Because.” Nancy says bluntly. Steve snorts. He leans forward suddenly, slamming the legs of the chair onto the tile floor of the library. Nancy winces at the crack of it. She glances across the room, trying to see if the librarian has looked up from her desk. When the librarian remains unfazed from reading some book, she looks back at Steve.

“You’re impossible Steve Harrington.”

“I could just become a model,” he says, ignoring what Nancy had said. “Just like half the other Aphrodite kids.”

Nancy purses her lips into a flat line, giving him an annoyed glare. “No. You’d hate being a model. I’m trying to keep that from happening.”

Steve blows a sharp breath out of his nose, looking away from her for a second. “You make studying look so easy.”

“The gift of my mother.” She deadpans. “But at least *try* and listen, maybe you’ll pick up something.”

Steve’s eyes shift back to her. She’s staring straight at him. In Nancy-Wheeler style, it’s sharp and serious, eyes squinting ever-so-slightly for effect.

Steve kind of crumbles under the stare, as he always does, and sighs. He leans forward to rest his arms on the table. “Okay, okay, teach me about… functions, or whatever.”

Nancy continues, and Steve actually tries to pay attention.

Across the library, Jonathan's hardly paying attention to his textbook. He's supposed to be doing chemistry homework but his mind keeps drifting. There's a lot happening in his world. Will's getting progressively more stressed out as the teachers in middle school start playing the 'you're going to be high schoolers soon' card. His mom and the sheriff are getting more serious… like the 'moving in together' serious. Steve has become a regular feature of lunch period, making the new student insert himself into Jonathan's orbit with little effort.

On top of all that, chemistry fucking sucks.

Anyways… in the week that Steve Harrington has gone to this school, he's spent every lunch sitting with Jonathan. The company is nice, don't get him wrong, but Jonathan doesn't know if he should trust it or not. Middle school friend betrayals had left scars. He's unsure if Steve is really true in his intent to be friends.

Some voice in the back of his mind tells him that it's okay. Steve has no ulterior motive. Steve wants to be his friend. Steve is…

Steve is indescribable.

That's probably the toughest part about this. There's just *something* about him. Something Jonathan can't put a label on. It's kind of driving him crazy.

His eyes drift away from the chem textbook, scanning the library. There's a sharp crack, and his eyes follow the sound.

Steve's sitting at a table with Nancy. They're talking quietly, Nancy reading out of a textbook, while Steve seems to be barely paying attention. It looks like they're studying-- the table's covered with notebooks, textbooks, and spare pieces of paper.

Jonathan bites his bottom lip as he watches the two of them talk

quietly. The photographer in him notes how the light from the window falls on Steve. The lighting's softer in here than it is in the cafeteria, but Steve's still glowing.

He realizes his camera's in his bag. He hesitates for a second, wondering if it'll be too creepy to take a picture… but he pushes those thoughts out of his mind and reaches into his bag. It'll be too good of a picture to resist.

He takes out the camera, taking off the lens cap and setting it on the table. He lines up the shot, focusing on Steve's silhouette. The shutter clicks, and he lowers the camera. He looks back at them. Nancy's staring straight at him, a blank expression on her face. Jonathan freezes.

Fuck-- he thinks, shoulders locking up.

Nancy stares at him for another second. Her gaze is intense. Jonathan's a little too freaked to tell if she's pissed off or not. The thought terrifies him though.

She looks away, turning her focus back to Steve. Jonathan's shoulders are still tight. He shakily grabs the lens cap, fumbling with it as he tries to put it back on the camera.

She doesn't look at him again, but Jonathan's heart is still racing. He reaches for the textbook still open on the table. He flips it shut, and picks it up. He haphazardly swings his bag over his shoulder and rushes out of the library.

He feels a pair of eyes on his back.

3. the sense that everything's about to change

Notes for the Chapter:

> this chapter is a show to my dedication to this fic, hahaha! i worked on this chapter a few hours after i got my wisdom teeth out. but yeah, for being on pretty heavy pain meds and my face smushed by ice packs, this chapter turned out pretty damn good!!
>
> (ch. title comes from 'The Sound of Awakening' by Walk the Moon)

The picture of Steve hangs on the drying rack of the school's developing room. As he ran it through the chemical baths, he regretted taking it. Admittedly, it was creepy to take a picture of the two of them without asking first… But the color is developing now, he doesn't regret it as much. The lighting is soft, highlighting the lines of his face and warming his skin. The focus has everything blurred, so it's just Steve in the center of the frame.

Jonathan looks at it as the rest of the batch dries. He feels a little bad still, despite how it came out, and he's fairly worried what Nancy will do to him. The stare she had given him honestly had him scared. He hardly knows Nancy, and judging by the popular jocks she spends most of her time with, he doesn't really want to mess with her.

He carefully takes the photo down, setting it off to the side. The rest are nearly dry. Once they're done, he can put them away in his bag and head home. He sighs softly, brushing some hair away from his eyes.

Behind him, the door creaks open. He turns, expecting to see one of Forst's photography students. Instead, there stands Steve.

He panics, knowing the photo's sitting in front of him. He flips the picture over, trying to hide the motion by turning to face Steve.

"What are you doing here?" He hopes that doesn't come out harsh.

“Nancy told me that you take pictures.” Steve steps in, closing the door behind him. Jonathan’s stomach drops on instinct. Instead of coming after him herself, she sicced Steve on him. *Betrayal* .

“So I figured I might find you here.”

Jonathan swallows thickly, leaning against the table. He puts a hand on the flipped over photo, sliding it so it’s hidden behind his back.

“Say anything else?” He asks, trying to keep his cool. Steve doesn’t seem to know about the photo. Or maybe he’s just a stellar actor.

Steve leans his back against the closed door, shaking his head. “Just said she sees you taking photos and sometimes leaving here.”

“Okay…” Jonathan slowly nods. “So what’d you want?”

Steve laughs a little. “I just wanted to hang out… see what you’re taking photos of.”

Jonathan glances over his shoulder, looking at the drying photos. Besides the one of Steve, it’s a mix of the changing trees and close-ups of random things in his house. He had been messing with the focus this week, using things around the house as practice.

“I was just about to leave,” he shrugs, reaching up and carefully taking down one of the photos.

It’s of the dying houseplant his mom keeps in the kitchen, right in front of the window. She keeps watering it, even though they all know the thing can’t be brought back. The light from the window makes it look more lively than it is. But close shot shows it for what it really is-- browning leaves and wilting stalks sitting in a cracked flower pot that’s too small for it.

“That’s fine. I just wanted to hang out for a bit.” Steve pushes away from the door, coming up to Jonathan to see the photo. As he looks at the picture of the dying houseplant, Jonathan glances up at him out of the corner of his eye. The red light of the darkroom makes him look creepy, casting eerie red patches across the curves of his face. He doesn’t look like he’s glowing in here.

“These are really good.” Steve says, looking up at the ones drying. Jonathan sheepishly smiles, setting the picture down on top of the flipped over picture.

“Thanks.” Jonathan says.

“How long have you been doing this? Taking photos, I mean.” Steve asks. He rests his palms on the edge of the table. Jonathan shrugs a shoulder. He reaches up, starting to take the other photos down.

“For a long time…” He says. “I don’t really remember when I started.”

He doesn’t remember what year it was, but he remembers his mom getting him his first camera for Christmas. He thinks it may have been after Lonnie, his father, had left his mom. But Lonnie hadn’t been there during a lot of Christmases so it’s hard to tell.

“Well you’re amazing.”

Jonathan smiles again.

“Thanks,” he repeats.

He looks over at Steve, and their eyes meet. Steve cracks a smile.

Jonathan looks away a second later, feeling a little awkward. He takes down the last photo, setting it on top of the small pile he’s got. He fidgets, straightening up the pile.

“Do you need a ride home?” Jonathan asks a minute later. He moves on, leaving the stack of photos on the table in order to start cleaning up.

“Nah,” Steve shakes his head. “My dad finally bought me a car, so I can drive now.”

Jonathan nods a little. “Sounds like fun.”

“Yeah,” Steve says. He cracks a small smile. “I missed driving! We had to sell my old car before moving to New York. It’s worthless driving in that city, so I haven’t driven in nearly a year.”

“Well fortunately it’ll be easy to get used to driving again.” Jonathan says. “Hawkins is probably the easiest place to drive in… I don’t think I’ve ever seen ‘traffic’ in town.”

Steve laughs a little. It makes Jonathan smile. But he turns his back to Steve, taking more time than necessary to put the bottles of chemicals back in the cabinet.

“Well wait…” he adds on. “The only traffic there ever is is around the school field on Fourth of July. It’s the best place to see the fireworks they set off down by the river, so everyone goes there.”

He turns back to Steve, who’s slowly nodding.

“Sounds like a real party. Sad that I missed it.” He says while smiling.

“Eh,” Jonathan shrugs. “I think it’s a little overrated… but my mom and brother love it, so…”

Steve slowly nods. “Still sounds like fun… Maybe if I’m in town for long enough I can see next year’s.”

Jonathan nods too. Silence falls once more. Jonathan continues cleaning up, putting the last of the bottles away.

“I have photos,” Jonathan says, turning a little. “If you want to see them…”

He looks up, meeting Steve’s eyes. Steve slowly breaks out into a smile.

“I’d love to.”

Jonathan looks back at the cabinet, hiding a sheepish smile.

He puts the final bottle away, then he closes the cabinet door before turning back towards Steve.

“I can bring them to school soon. You can look at them during lunch.” He offers, picking his bag up from off the floor. He slings it over a shoulder, grabbing the small stack of photos on the table.

“I’d like that.” Steve’s still smiling, nodding in agreement.

Jonathan cracks a small smile. He holds the stack of photos in one hand, the other rests on the strap of his bag; nervously fidgeting with a rip in the fabric.

Steve’s smile fades after a few seconds. He glances at the door, running a few fingers through his hair. Jonathan can’t help but note how despite brushing the hair out of his eyes, a few strands land back in front of them.

“Ready to go?” Steve asks, knocking Jonathan out of his mini-trance.

“Y-Yeah,” he nods, stepping towards the door. Steve gestures for him to lead the way.

“So? Where are they?”

Jonathan hasn’t even sat down at the table yet. He sets his tray down, looking across the table to Steve. Steve is picking at the food on his tray, as usual, and looks up at Jonathan with an expectant look.

“Where is what…?” Jonathan asks as he lowers himself onto the bench. As he sits, he lets his bag slip off his shoulder and rest between his feet.

“Didn’t you say you’d bring some photos for me to look at?” Steve looks at him expectantly.

“Oh! Right…” Jonathan sighs, and runs a hand over his face. “I knew I was leaving the house this morning and forgetting something…”

“That’s okay man.” Steve shrugs. “You can bring them tomorrow.”

“If I remember,” Jonathan says.

“I can be patient.” Steve says, which makes Jonathan snort.

“Patient? I hadn’t even sat down yet and you were already asked.”

“That was excitement.” Steve tries to defend himself, but Jonathan only laughs.

“Sure, whatever you say…”

Steve huffs dramatically, crossing his arms like a child. Jonathan keeps laughing, and takes a forkful of the suspicious looking spaghetti and meatballs on his lunch tray. He takes a bite, and as he chews, Steve’s over the top look fades.

“Would it bother you if I stayed after school with you?” Steve changes the topic suddenly. “Like… while you’re in the developing room.”

“I guess so… but why?” Jonathan asks. “It’s not all that interesting.”

It really isn’t. He dips some papers into various chemical baths, then hangs them up to dry. Then he waits, and then tries his best to read whatever book he’s got with him that week. Reading is a slow going process though, since he’s reading by the dark red light.

But the whole process isn’t really entertaining, so why would Steve want to be there?

Steve shrugs. “I want to see what you make… Your photos are amazing.”

Jonathan looks away shyly.

Only his family sees the photos, and they always shower him in compliments. But they’re his family, so it’s not all that special. But Steve, who’s only seen one batch of photos? That’s different.

He feels heat on his cheeks, and knows he’s blushing.

“Thanks.” He looks back at Steve, who’s smiling warmly.

“I guess you can, but I’m warning you that it’s more boring than you

think it is."

"So? You say everything's boring." Steve's got him there.

Jonathan laughs, taking another bite of his lunch.

"Maybe I'm not suited for Hawkins."

"You'd love New York then," Steve says.

He remembers the first lunch they had together-- Jonathan had kept asking about what it was like to live in New York. Jonathan had seemed so wistful about it, like he was imagining himself in the situations Steve had described. Jonathan was picturing himself standing on the subway platform, one person amongst hundreds. He pictured himself cutting through Central Park to get to a little hole-in-the-wall cafe. He pictured himself living in an apartment the size of a closet that cost *way* too much… the list went on and on.

"I was thinking about applying to NYU," Jonathan admits.

Steve nods. He's still pushing the food on his tray around, not really interested in eating the quite frankly disgusting spaghetti and meatballs.

"You'd like it there," Steve says. "Plus, if you got in I could visit you."

Steve cracks a smile, pushing around a mostly cold meatball with a plastic fork.

Jonathan smiles too. "Yeah, but it depends on *if* I got in."

"I believe you can."

The two share a smile. Naturally, the conversation shifts to something else. It's light and casual, but still puts butterflies in Jonathan's stomach that persist until the bell rings to end lunch.

As Jonathan studies that night in his room, he keeps thinking about what him and Steve talked about during lunch.

Willingly, Steve wants to hang out with Jonathan outside of school. (Well, is it outside of school if they're still on school property…?) Well, hangout outside of school hours. But still-- he never thought that would happen?

Is this what having a friend is like ?

He's never really had something like this before, and it's pretty damn exciting.

He's supposed to be studying chemistry but it's so difficult. Not only is it *chemistry* , but it's balancing reaction questions which makes no sense to him. Halfway through the semester he's barely skimming by with a C, and each week only gets harder and harder... so h e *really fucking needs to focus* but it's so difficult to when his mind keeps drifting back to Steve and his budding friendship. It's one thing to just sit together at lunch, or talk during school. Those 'friendships' are really only there because you see them five days a week all year… but Steve asking to hang out means it's something bigger.

It's thrilling, and Jonathan easily ignores his chemistry textbook to think about that.

From the hall, the phone suddenly starts to right.

He doesn't get up to answer it, since a second later he hears his mom's footsteps coming down the hall. She picks up the phone, and Jonathan turns his attention back to his homework. It's probably just Hopper calling.

Jonathan forces himself to focus again. He scans the textbook page, jotting down a few notes in his textbook. He copies down a practice problem, and starts to work through it when his mother interrupts him.

" *Jonathan* ?" Joyce calls from the hall. "Phone!"

Jonathan furrows his eyebrows, glancing over his shoulder at the door. Nobody's ever called for him… He stands up a second later, crossing his room.

Joyce is standing at the end of the hall, the phone wedged between her shoulder. She looks over her shoulder, seeing Jonathan and she holds the phone out for him.

"Who is it?" Jonathan asks as he walks up to her.

"Steve… I think?" She says. "I don't know who it is."

Jonathan's still confused, but he takes the phone anyway.

"How'd you get my number?" Jonathan asks immediately, not giving Steve time to say anything.

Steve laughs a little at the abruptness.

The phone makes his laugh more raspy, Jonathan notices.

"Yellow Pages." Steve says simply.

Jonathan's kind of shocked. Steve had to have gone through some effort to find the directory… Which is confusing. If Steve wanted his phone number, he could've just asked.

"Oh." Jonathan says after a few seconds of silence. He glances up, expecting to see his mom still standing there. But she's disappeared back into the kitchen, and by the smell she must be cooking dinner.

"What are you doing?" Steve asks.

"Studying chemistry," Jonathan says. Steve groans.

"Oh my god fuck chemistry."

Jonathan laughs, and shifts his weight from one foot to the other. "But what do you want? And if you wanted my number, you could've just asked me… You didn't need to go looking for it."

"I know, but it's more fun this way," Steve says. Jonathan has no clue

why Steve would want to go through all that trouble, but sure okay...

“But anyways, I’m trying to convince you to hang out with me.”

“I thought you were coming to the dark room with me next week..?” Jonathan asks.

“I know, but I want to go somewhere else. Do you accept?”

“I feel like I’ll be signing up for something horrible if I say yes.” Jonathan deadpans. Steve must’ve found it funny though, instead of threatening. Steve laughs, louder this time.

“I’m not *that* bad,” Steve says. Jonathan can practically hear his smile through the phone. “But come on, what do you say?”

Jonathan lets out a heavy sigh, mostly for the dramatics. Steve’s flare for the dramatics may be contagious.

“I guess.”

Steve cheers on the other side of the phone. There’s some rustling, muffling Steve’s cheer.

“I’ll be there soon!” His voice is clear again. Jonathan holds in an eyeroll.

“You don’t know my address… Unless you also found that in the yellow pages,” Jonathan says.

Steve doesn’t say anything for a few seconds, then there’s the distant sound of pages flipping.

Jonathan nearly laughs.

“How about I pick you up?” Jonathan offers. “Finding my address and phone number is creepy.”

He glances at the entrance to the kitchen. His mom has yet to peek out, showing that she’s eavesdropping. He looks away, staring at the picture on the wall. It’s one of the pictures he took a few years ago, when he got his first camera. It’s of his mom and Will; the two of

them have megawatt smiles as they celebrate Christmas. It was their first without Lonnie. Of course they were in the mood to celebrate.

“Sounds good,” Steve says, drawing Jonathan back to the conversation. “I’ll give you my address…”

Steve finds it after a few seconds, rattling it off. Jonathan repeats it a few times in his head. He knows the street, so it’s not hard. It’s on the opposite side of Hawkins, where a housing development was built a decade ago. They’re nice houses.

“I’ll be there in a bit, okay?” Jonathan runs a hand through his hair.

“Sounds good!” Steve chirps. A second later, the line goes flat.

Jonathan snorts, and pulls the phone away. No hello or goodbye. He sets the phone in the receiver, letting out a long breath. He takes one step forward before he hears his mom’s footsteps.

“Who was that?” She asks.

Jonathan turns to face her. “Steve Harrington. He moved here last week.”

Joyce nods a little. She leans against the door frame. “Why was he calling?”

“He wants to hang out for a while.”

Joyce’s face lights up at the implications that Jonathan’s making a new friend. It flickers across her face, but within seconds she reels it in. Jonathan picks up on it though; she’s never been the best at hiding her emotions. But he loves that about his mom. She’s in tune with her emotions, and isn’t afraid to show them.

“I’ll be back in awhile.” He walks down the hall, past the kitchen and into the living room.

“Well have fun sweetie,” Joyce calls after him. He also loves that she knows that it wouldn’t be a good idea to make a big deal out of this. So without freaking out, she smiles.

Jonathan glances over his shoulder, cracking a smile.

Joyce watches him grab his jacket from the coat rack, and keys from the little table by the door. When he opens the door, she gives him one last smile before disappearing back into the kitchen. Jonathan turns, stepping out and closing the door behind him.

In seconds, he pulls his jacket closer. It's already starting to get chilly, and they're only a week into November. But the cold weather isn't too bad; Jonathan's always loved bundling up in layers and it's easier to get away with it in the winter time.

He walks to his car, glancing around. The sun is slowly sinking into the trees, casting jagged shadows across the lawn. He unlocks the car, giving the shadows one last look. It'd make for a good picture.

He climbs in the car, starting it. The second the engine's running, he turns on the heat and the radio. Upbeat rock music filters in through the speakers. He turns it up, glancing in the rearview mirror before backing out of the driveway.

Notes for the Chapter:

> as of posting this chapter, I've got 7 chapters fully completed, one or two in need of editing, and a few more planned out!!! Hopefully, there will be some regular updates for the next few weeks. All it took was getting wisdom teeth out to get me writing again, lmao <3<3

4. so take me away, i don't mind

Notes for the Chapter:

> chapter title comes from 'Back in Time' by Huey Lewis and the News.

The second he’s put the car in park, the door to the Harrington house is thrown open. Jonathan snorts quietly, watching Steve bound across the lawn.

Since they had just moved in, the lawn was a little overgrown with dead grass. But the lawn’s still nice. It matches the house, both are large, clean, and beautiful. Steve’s house is painted an off white, with two stories and picture windows that reveal a modern interior. Most of the blinds are drawn, but Jonathan knows that the house is magnificent. His own house barely compares.

Steve yanks on the handle to the door. When it doesn't open, he whines. Jonathan laughs again, reaching across the seat to unlock it. Steve opens the door in a second, slipping in and shutting it sharply.

“God it’s cold,” he shivers, making Jonathan crack a smile.

“It’s going to get colder.”

“I know,” Steve groans. He leans forward, messing with the heater. Jonathan doesn’t have the heart to slap his hand away or scold Steve. “I’m not meant for cold weather.”

Jonathan nearly laughs. He’s always loved winter. The cold lets him bundle up in layers, and gives him an excuse to stay inside all day. The sharp chill of the air is refreshing too. Plus, the grey tones of winter create a unique look that Jonathan loves to take photos of.

“So, where we headed to?” Steve asks as Jonathan pulls out of the neighborhood and onto the main road.

“I don’t know,” Jonathan shrugs. “Like I said, there isn’t much in town.”

Steve huffs. Jonathan glances at him out of the corner of his eye. Steve's not looking at him, his eyes are focused on the window. He's tapping the rhythm of the radio on his leg.

"Then where's the best food?"

"There's a diner nearby that's got good burgers." Jonathan says.

Steve nods. "Burgers sound good."

"Okay," Jonathan nods too.

Benny's Burgers has been in town for a long time now. The guy who owns it, Benny of course, opened it straight out of high school and has been running the place ever since. Jonathan goes there a lot, since his mom went to high school with Benny and they're still friends. And don't forget the delicious food he serves.

When Jonathan steps in to the diner, Benny nods a silent hello through the window to the kitchen. Jonathan returns it, and immediately heads towards the booth he always sits at. It's tucked in the corner, by one of the windows. The left bench creaks, so he always takes it while Will and his mom sit on the other. He sits on the left bench, and Steve takes the right.

A server comes a second later, setting down menus and saying they'll be back to take their orders. Steve quickly thanks them, and the server smiles before heading back to the kitchen.

"So what makes this place so good?" Steve asks after a minute. He's drumming his fingers on the cover of the menu, not even bothering to look in it.

Jonathan's scanning the menu, even though he knows what he's getting. A habit, he assumes, since he always gets the same. A burger with lettuce, ketchup, cheddar, bacon, and a side of chili cheese fries. It's probably a heart attack on a plate, but that's the thing with diner food, right? The greasier the better.

"The chili cheese fries." Jonathan says, eyes skimming the daily

specials.

Steve slowly nods. He still hasn't looked at the menu. Jonathan's a little confused, but he won't ask why.

The server comes back, ready to take their orders. Jonathan tells them, and then the server turns to Steve.

"I'll have what he's having," he smiles warmly. The server smiles back. They nod and pick up the menus before walking to the kitchen. Jonathan watches them leave, then looks back at Steve.

"You could've gotten something else…" Jonathan says softly.

Steve shrugs a shoulder, leaning back in the booth. He looks relaxed, at ease; it nearly makes Jonathan *more* anxious.

He's always at Benny's with his family, but being here with Steve feels like a whole new experience. Maybe it's the slight anxiety that sits in his stomach about how he hopes to be entertaining enough to keep Steve as a friend. That fear of losing Steve after this little meal out scares him.

It doesn't help that Steve's got this unwavering, relaxed confidence. It's a little unnerving to see Steve so relaxed by this new experience while Jonathan's all wound up. But Jonathan's got the good skill of swallowing his nerves.

"I trust that you have good taste." Steve cracks a smile again.

"I don't know about that." Jonathan brushes a stray strand of hair out from in front of his eyes. Steve's eyes follow the movement, and Jonathan bites the inside of his lip.

"Well I guess I'll find out," Steve says.

The server comes back, dropping off a water for Jonathan and a coke for Steve. Steve smiles as a thank you, swirling his drink with the straw. Ice clinks against the side of the glass.

Steve's got the carefree look down cold, Jonathan notices. He's reclined back in the booth, lazily swirling his drink as he scans the

diner. His shades are pushed up into his hair, making his hair look even fluffier.

Jonathan bites the inside of his lip again, not really knowing what to say. He's never been the best conversationalist, and he's clamming up even more since Steve's here. During lunch, Steve carries a lot of the conversation. Now that Steve's pretty quiet though, not much is being said. Jonathan knows he should be saying something to make this fun… Steve seems like a great guy so far, and he'd hate to lose him so soon.

"So you've been in Hawkins your whole life?" Steve's the one to start the conversation. He sits up a bit, his eyes coming back to Jonathan.

"Yeah," Jonathan nods. "I've never moved."

"Wow… I don't think I can picture myself living in the same house my whole life." Steve takes a sip of his drink.

"Move often?" Jonathan asks.

"Oh yeah," Steve says with a disgruntled sigh. "I think I'm up to my eleventh or twelth address."

Jonathan's eyes widen. "Holy shit."

"Yeah," Steve laughs a little, "I know. New York was probably the longest one."

"Why did you move so often?"

"My dad's work. We have to move often." Steve says. He stops stirring his drink. He clasps his hands together, resting them on the table.

"Is it bad moving all the time?" Jonathan tilts his head a little. Just like Steve can't imagine living in the same house his whole life, he can't imagine moving constantly. His whole life is rooted in his house; he doesn't think he could ever narrow it down to just a handful of boxes. Something in his stomach dips, and he suddenly feels bad for Steve.

Steve shrugs. “It’s sort of good and bad… Some places just aren’t for me, I guess.”

Jonathan slowly nods, even if he doesn’t understand the feeling. Occasionally, he feels like he doesn’t fit in in Hawkins, but unlike Steve, he doesn’t have the opportunity to move. Not until college at least, but that’s still a year and a half away.

“What’s the best place you’ve been in?”

Jonathan wonders if he’s asking too many questions. But it’s better than sitting in silence, right?

The question makes Steve think. He purses his lips, unsure if he can come up with an answer. While New York City had been a vibrant city, but he felt like somebody was always watching him. The California weather had been amazing, although the private school has dad had put him in for a few months sucked. He had dotted the Midwest, living in nothing-special towns whose names he’s long forgotten.

In the end, he shrugs.

“I can’t really decide.” He says. “Even though I liked New York a lot, there was nothing really keeping me there besides my dad. And every other place was kind of the same thing.”

Jonathan slowly nods. Steve knows Jonathan is unfamiliar with the sentiment.

Before their conversation continues, the server comes back with two plates heaping with food. They set down both dishes, wish them a good meal, and then disappear back into the kitchen.

Steve hums a little, scanning the plate. His mouth nearly starts watering. The chili cheese fries look amazing; he can barely see the

fries under all the chili. And the burger is stacked tall, looking incredible.

Jonathan digs right in, and Steve figures he should too. He takes one bite of the burger and nearly moans.

“ *Oh holy shit* , you weren’t kidding.” He says with a mouthful of food. Jonathan laughs a little. He has the courtesy to swallow before he talks.

“I told you it was good.” He cracks a warm smile, picking up one of the fries. Steve takes one of his own. It’s just as good as the burger.

“Okay, you’re taking me here again soon.” He insists in between bites.

Jonathan smiles shyly, nodding. “Okay.”

Steve smiles for a second, then pops a fry into his mouth.

As they eat in relative silence, Steve can’t help but let his mind wander. The silence is comfortable, causing his thoughts to land on Jonathan.

Jonathan’s probably the nicest person he’s met in a long time. New York was full of assholes, and time spent at previous addresses had given him little time to make friends. He wishes he can stay in Hawkins. He barely knows anyone besides Nancy and Jonathan, and he’d hate to leave either one of them.

Nancy’s been his friend for years, so it’s awesome to finally be around her in person. Since they’ve always been penpals, she’s never seen him for his looks, making her the only girl who’s never flirted with him. It’s a relief.

And Jonathan. Jonathan’s kind, funny, and welcoming. And besides their initial encounter with the staring, he hasn’t tried to flirt with him. Just about everyone else he’s talked to while in town has tried to flirt with him, so it’s a breath of fresh air to talk to somebody not interested in getting in his pants.

He has noticed that Jonathan gets a little awkward sometimes, but he doesn't know if that's because he's just awkward in general or because of his looks. He's yet to figure that one out, but he feels in no rush to find out since Jonathan makes him feel relaxed. That's a miracle since starting at a new school always gets his nerves buzzing like a livewire.

His eyes slowly move up to Jonathan as he thinks. Jonathan's looking out the window, staring off into space. Steve swallows his food, and takes a sip of his soda.

For once, he's not nervous. Usually, he really is when he's hanging out with people. He's scared he'll make a wrong impression and scare people off. Thanks to moving schools constantly, he rarely makes long lasting friends, considering most people just flirt with him.

And Jonathan is one of the few to not see him for just his looks.

Steve doesn't want to scare Jonathan away.

"So we're doing this again." Steve says with finality as the car slows to a stop in front of his house.

Jonathan looks over at him, an indecipherable look in his eye.

"You free Thursday?" Steve asks, hand on the door handle.

"I work at the movie theatre Thursdays." Jonathan says. "How about I call you?"

"You don't have my number." Steve raises an eyebrow.

"Yellow pages," Jonathan cracks a grin. Steve laughs, opening the door.

"I'll be waiting," Steve says in a sing-song tone as he shuts the door

behind him. Jonathan smiles at him through the car window. Steve smiles back before turning and crossing the lawn to the porch.

As he opens the door, Jonathan drives off. He glances over his shoulder just as the car disappears around the corner. He looks back at the door, reaching into his pocket for the house key. There's still a smile on his face as he steps into the house.

It's not a surprise to him that the house is empty when he gets home.

Of course he's dad is still at work, even though it's just after seven at night. At least Steve already ate, so now he doesn't have to cook a meal for one.

Steve kicks his shoes off by the door, and meanders up the stairs with socked feet. In the hallway, there's still a few boxes left to be unpacked. They're full of spare towels and other bathroom stuff Steve and his dad have no use for right now.

Steve slips by the boxes, and to his room at the end of the hall. For the most part, he's unpacked his room. His warm-weather clothes are still in their box, but it's tucked into his closet until that time comes. There's the chance he might not even unpack it in this house after all.

He throws himself onto his bed, landing on his stomach. He rolls over to lay on his back, and stares up at the bare white ceiling.

Hanging out with Jonathan had been fun. They didn't do anything exciting, or even talk about anything special. But it was just the company. Jonathan was probably the most genuine person he's met, besides Nancy of course. Jonathan didn't hide his intentions like his father, or had shallow opinions like the people in his last school.

Jonathan Byers had real depth.

Steve cracks a smile, and he realizes that he feels like a school girl

with her first crush. He's almost giddy-- happy that he made a friend so fast. He laughs at himself, sitting up and running a hand through his hair.

It's real girly, but hell, thanks to his mom he's fairly feminine. (Nothing wrong with that of course, the time he dedicates to caring for his hair *absolutely* pays off.)

He swings his legs over the side of the bed. He's a second away from tugging off his shirt to get ready to take a shower when the door opens downstairs. He pushes his shirt back down, and stands up fully.

As he crosses his room to the door, he glances at the alarm clock on the nightstand. *8 :18* . His father has worked later, but still. They've only been in Hawkins for two weeks and his dad is already working late? It's a little disheartening, and Steve brushes off that thought by opening his bedroom door and padding down the hall.

The footsteps move into the kitchen, and Steve goes down the stairs two steps at a time to get to his dad.

His dad stands in the kitchen, peering into the nearly empty fridge. Despite the grocery run last week, Steve still didn't get all that much.

Steve turns the corner into the kitchen just in time to catch his dad scowling at the contents of the fridge.

"You should've gotten more when you were at the store," his dad says.

"I didn't have enough money." Steve leans against the frame of the door. He fiddles with the hem of his shirt awkwardly. Just by his dad's tone, he can tell that it wasn't a good day at work.

"I wish I had a beer," his dad mutters, closing the fridge door and running his hands over his face.

Steve purses his lips into a flat line, but doesn't say anything. He doesn't want to further worsen his dad's mood by some unnecessary comment.

"Do you need me to go to the store again?" He asks instead.

His dad's hands fall away from his face, and he stares at his son from across the room. There's bags under his father's eyes, and a stubble growing on his chin. He's exhausted, clearly. Steve feels bad, even though it's really not his fault.

"I guess…" His dad lets out a long breath. "Just get some fuckin' beer, okay?"

"I'm underage dad," Steve reminds him, sadly.

What does his dad think of him? He's not even eighteen yet. His dad makes some kind of grunt. He turns, showing his back to his son. Steve frowns, scratching the back of his elbow awkwardly.

"Right… just get some food." His dad digs through his pockets, pulling out of his wallet. He tosses it on the table, not even bothering to hand it over to his own son.

"You can borrow my card." His dad mutters, then turns and walks out of the kitchen. His shoulder knocks against Steve's. Then, his father goes up stairs and disappears.

Steve watches him go, and when he can't see his father anymore, he sighs heavily. Without a word, he grabs his dad's wallet, shoves his feet into his shoes, and leaves to go to the store.

5. ain't going away without a fight

Notes for the Chapter:

> in this chapter I kinda realized that Karen is Nancy's stepmom, making Mike and Holly her half siblings. (They don't tell anybody about Nancy not being Karen's though). Plus, thanks to a comment on an earlier chapter, I also realized that that means that Ted slept with Athena, hahaha!
>
> (chapter title comes from Friends by Marshmello and Anne-Marie)

Joining the basketball team is how he meets one asshole named *Billy Hargrove.*

He likes playing basketball, honestly, but Billy Hargrove makes him want to pull out his perfectly groomed hair. He has no clue how he hasn't seen Billy around school until now, but the guy bounced onto Steve on the first day of practice like a shark smelling blood in the water.

Within minutes, he painted himself as the most cocky, arrogant, douchey, flaunting-his-popularity-by-calling-himself- *The-King* prick. He was on 'skins' for practice, and tugged off his shirt without hesitation and revealed model-like abs that would only take near-constant working out to achieve. They weren't even the muscles you use for actual life, they were the muscles that were for show.

Steve had looked away, unsure of how to feel about that. Sure, he had Aphrodite's beauty on his side, but even then he wasn't *that* fit. He feels a little intimidated, if he's honest.

" *Plant your feet!"* Billy barks. He swipes the ball from Steve, simultaneously tripping him. Steve falls to the floor, landing on his ass. He grits his teeth, flicking a hand up to brush the hair off his sweat-covered forehead. Billy dribbles away, leaving Steve fuming on

the floor of the gym.

Billy's like a cheetah.

He's lightning fast. He sets his eye on a target and sticks with it without mercy.

Steve's the target.

It's incredibly frustrating to keep getting knocked on his ass, belittled in front of the team, and yet be indecently flirted with in the locker room. Billy has some weird sex thing going on-- Steve keeps getting flirted with or sent risque winks. But it doesn't even stay in practice anymore. The second the two had met, Steve was seeing Billy *everywhere* in school. In the halls, Billy will send a wink his way, and if close enough, slap his ass.

He's the worst person Steve's ever met. Hands down. No hesitation. Zero doubt.

The coach's whistle blows, signalling the end of practice. As the team puts away equipment, the coach rattles off things they need to work on. Steve's barely listening as he gathers the motivation to pick his sorry ass off the gym floor and head into the locker room. He pushes off the floor, trying to not groan at the dull pain in his lower back. Billy had really knocked him down hard.

He crosses the gym, heading into the locker room. Some showers are already running, but Steve avoids them like the plague. He'd rather stew in sweat on the ride home and wash off there. Already, he avoids public restrooms because of Aphrodite's beauty causes some stares, but having Billy on top of that really turns him away from the idea.

He strips in one of the corners of the room, trying to be as quick as possible. He throws on clothes from earlier, and tosses his gym clothes into his locker. The locker door slams shut the second he pulls his hand out, startling him. Across the metal of the door lies Billy Hargrove's hand.

Steve rolls his eyes before turning to face Billy.

“What do you want?” He grinds out between clenched teeth.

Billy’s got that fucking *smirk* on. It’s his ‘ *I’m king of the world, eat out of the palm of my hand’* smirk. It’s sickening. Like Steve will bend over for him. As if.

“Scared of showering?” Billy raises an eyebrow.

“Not one bit.” Steve crosses his arms, steeling himself for whatever shit is about to spew from Billy’s mouth.

Billy leans in, bringing their faces close. If it were any other person, it’d look like they were about to kiss. But it’s Billy-- Steve’s two seconds away from decking him in the face.

Billy slowly nods, humming a little. It’s like he’s piecing things together in his mind, coming to some kind of conclusion. Steve doesn’t know what the fuck he’s ‘concluding’.

“What do you want?” Steve repeats. He really doesn’t want to continue this conversation.

“Attention, oh King Steve,” Billy whines overdramatically. He finally pulls back, leaning his back against the locker with a hand over his chest like it’s killing him.

Steve barely restrains himself from rolling his eyes. “Too bad jackass.”

He picks his bag up off the bench, swinging one strap over his shoulder. “Maybe some other time.”

Billy bristles, gritting his teeth. He doesn’t like being told no, obviously. He clamps a hand on Steve’s shoulder just as Steve turns. He whirls Steve back around, clamping the other hand on Steve’s other shoulder. He leans in again. Steve can feel his warm breath on his face. It’s disgusting and reeks of smoke.

“You’re not the fucking king--” Billy’s voice is low. “You’re a spoiled fucking princess.”

“According to you, I’m the king.” Steve doesn’t know how he does it--

his voice somehow remains neutral. He's not really scared, just disgusted. Billy feels slimy and disgusting this close. His breath reeks of smoke and his body radiates cheap cologne.

Billy's jaw clenches. Steve can nearly hear his teeth grinding together.

"Don't *fuck* with me, Hargrove." Steve commands. He grabs Billy's wrists, forcefully yanking Billy's hands away from him.

Billy's ready to pounce, but Steve turns his back on him.

Steve can feel Billy's gaze burning holes in his back as he leaves the locker room.

"Is Billy Hargrove gay?" Steve asks. His hair is still damp from his shower. He had gone home, showered, then left for Nancy's.

Nancy snorts so hard it sounds like it hurt her.

Steve props himself up on his elbows, looking at her.

He's sprawled on his back on her bed. She's leaning against some pillows by the headboard, a textbook and notebook in her lap. She's trying to focus on studying, but Steve's not helping.

"God no," she shakes her head, laughing a little. "He's with a different girl every week."

"Maybe that's to hide his homosexuality." Steve wonders aloud. He lets his elbows slide down the sheets, laying back down. His eyes land on a water stain in the corner of the ceiling.

"I don't know…" Nancy trails off. "What made you think of that?"

"He keeps messing with me… and it's not like 'I'm going to bully you'

messing with… but like that kind of flirting boys do in elementary school." He rambles a little. "Like-... like if a boy pulls on your ponytail, it means he likes you. That kind of flirting."

Nancy snorts again. Some papers shift, but Steve doesn't look over at her.

"He's like that with everybody." She says. "I wouldn't look into it too much. He's just an asshole."

Steve purses his lips together. He's met people like that, but Billy just seems different. There's something about him that he can't put a finger on, but it's definitely just his personality.

"I don't know. He's an asshole." He agrees. "Has he flirted with you?"

"Freshman year," Nancy nods. She looks up from her textbook, trying to remember the situation. "He wanted me to have this party, since my parents were going out of town. He wanted to take me down or something, since I was a 'goody-two-shoes' or whatever."

"To be fair, you are a goody-two-shoes." Steve cuts in.

" *Okay,* whatever-- but I didn't have the party. He called me a bitch behind my back, but I didn't care. Nobody cared either since he had moved here like three months before."

Steve laughs. "Yeah that sounds like you."

Nancy makes an offended noise, but it was more for the dramatics than actually being offended.

"What! It's a compliment!" Steve sits up fully this time. "You're a strong woman who doesn't let men like him hurt you."

He's also being dramatic, to be fair.

Nancy laughs, leaning back against the headboard. "Yet I'm friends with you."

Steve kicks her leg, whining at her comment. "I'm perfectly *fine* , thank you!"

“You stress me out.” Nancy rolls her eyes, kicking him back.

Steve whines again, ready to say something back when there’s a knock on the door.

“Come in!” Nancy yells, kicking Steve one last time.

The door cracks open, and in pokes Mike.

“Dinner’s ready,” Mike says. He sees Steve, then continues, “I guess Steve can join us.”

Nancy nods, and Mike leaves them alone.

“Doesn’t your mom hate me?” Steve asks after the door shuts. Nancy snorts again.

“She doesn’t. She’s just bitchy to everyone.” Nancy shrugs. She picks up her work, moving it from her bed to her desk. Steve follows her with his eyes.

She closes the textbook, adding it to the stack of books already on the desk. Steve groans a little, sitting up and swinging his legs over the side of the bed. He gets up, following Nancy downstairs.

Dinner with the Wheelers is awkward.

Mike stabs at the food on his plate, acting like some moody preteen. Mr. Wheeler eats silently, like he doesn’t notice anybody else sitting with him. Mrs. Wheeler bounces between eating her own food and helping Holly with her’s. Steve and Nancy sit side-by-side, sharing looks. They’ve never been romantically interested in each other, but Mrs. Wheeler likes to push the two of them together, hoping they’ll kiss or something.

Karen turns her attention back to Holly, and Steve nudges Nancy under the table. Her head shots up, giving him a nasty look. He has to bite back a laugh. Instead, he takes a large bite of mashed potatoes.

“How are you settling in Hawkins, Steve?” Mrs. Wheeler asks, seconds before Steve swallows.

He nearly chokes on his potatoes, swallowing a big hunk so he can respond.

“Fine, fine,” he nods, reaching for his glass of water.

“Has your father found a job?”

He assumes yes, since his dad’s been out a lot lately… But his dad’s work has always been a mysterious thing. So he’s never known what his dad does; something with… accounting? Maybe. Something with numbers.

“Yeah… he has.” He nods, taking a sip of his water. He meets Nancy’s eye, and she sees right through his bullshit. She knows that he’s completely unaware about his dad. All he knows is that his dad is out of the house from 8 to 5 nearly every day. Well, usually 8 to 5. It’s been getting later and later though.

Karen keeps asking questions, making small talk as if to fill the silence. Steve gets the feeling that if he wasn’t here, they’d be eating without a word. Judging by her stereotypical housewife personality, Karen probably drowns in the silence. Him being her is her solace, except it’s torturing him.

“Mom!” Nancy quietly scolds after the fifth or sixth meaningless question.

The questions are rapid fire, empty and blank like they had been rehearsed. Steve knows Karen couldn’t care less about his answers--she just wants to talk for the sake of it.

“Let Steve eat,” Nancy’s exasperated words shuts her mother up. Steve feels kind of bad. He would’ve humored Karen and let her interview him. Karen takes a bite of the meatloaf, letting silence take over.

It’s probably more awkward than the first time it was quiet.

Mike finishes first, asking to be excused as he’s carrying his plate into

the other room. Mr. Wheeler goes next, following after his son a few seconds later. Mrs. Wheeler's face falls for a split second before she smiles at Holly, quietly encouraging her to eat her peas.

Nancy and Steve share a look, and silently agree to stick it out for a few more minutes before going back upstairs. As much as Mrs. Wheeler is too much, it's painfully obvious that it kills her to put in so much effort but be given so little in return.

"Does your mom like you?" Steve asks as Nancy shuts the door to her room. He takes a seat at the desk this time, instead of flopping all over the bed.

"Because I'm not actually her daughter? I mean, I don't think she hates me." Nancy walks over to the dresser, carefully taking her hair out of the ponytail it's been in all day. "I think she just tries to bond with me but she doesn't know how to actually do it. I'm not really the daughter she wanted… So I think she loves Holly more."

Steve presses his lips into a flat line. That's how he imagines it is with his father. His dad didn't know how to connect with him when Steve was younger, so now as Steve's gotten older, he's given up trying to bond. Now he's was too busy wrapped up in work to get to know his own son.

Some days he wonders if his dad didn't have a kid. Maybe his mother suckered him into a kid, and then when she gave birth she dropped him in his father's arms and ran. Being literally abandoned by his mom and essentially abandoned by his father stings.

From there, the conversation kind of dies. Nancy brushes her hair, looking at herself through the mirror. Steve's eyes unfocus as he thinks about his dad.

When Nancy's done, she goes back to studying, and breaks Steve's train of thought by forcing him to study with her.

When he gets home a few hours later, he's greeted with the sight of his father drinking on the couch and watching TV. His father doesn't even glance over as Steve kicks off his shoes by the front door. With a dissatisfied look, Steve watches his father stare at the TV blankly and sip at a glass filled with amber colored alcohol.

With a silent sigh, Steve pads up the stairs with socked feet. He goes down the hall to his room, rubbing at his eyes. The drive home had made him pretty tired, even though it was only a ten minute trip. Long day, really. He had practice after school, ran home to shower, then went to Nancy's. He didn't really give himself much alone time, and now it's coming back to him as he nudges the door to his room closed behind him with his foot.

With a yawn, he flops onto the bed face first. He doesn't even bother pulling the covers over himself, or changing into pajamas, as he curls up on the bed. He brings a pillow close to his chest, wrapping it up in a tight hug.

From the downstairs hallway, the phone rings. It echos through the house, disturbing Steve's nap before it even started. He groans. Despite his father being a few feet from the phone, the chances of him answering it are slim to none. So he rolls over and swings his legs haphazardly over the side of the bed. He stands and yawns, then crosses his bedroom to go down the hall. He stumbles a little as he steps out into the hall. He pads down the hall, down the stairs, into the living room, then into the little hall that branches off the living room.

The phone's still ringing, and he quickly picks it up before it stops.

"Hello? Harrington residence." He rubs one of his eyes as he rattles off a greeting.

"Hey Steve- it's Jonathan." The person on the other line says. Steve suddenly perks up, eyes wide in happy surprise.

"Jonathan! Hey!" He leans a hip against the table the phone's on. "You found my number."

“Yeah,” Jonathan trails off into a laugh. “I really had to look for it… I didn’t realize that your phone wouldn’t be in the yellow pages, since you only moved a few weeks ago.”

Steve laughs too. “So how’d you find it then?”

“My mom’s dating the sheriff,” Jonathan says.

Steve raises an eyebrow, even though he knows Jonathan can’t see him.

“Should I be worried then?”

“No?” Jonathan doesn’t really know what to say to that. “Why…? Nevermind, all that matters is that I have it now, right?”

“Yeah,” Steve nods. “But what’s up? Did you call just to talk?”

There’s a little bit of rustling from the other end of the phone. Steve shifts, turning to lean his lower back against the edge of the table.

“I don’t know…” Jonathan trails off, sighing quietly. “Are you busy this weekend?”

“Nope,” Steve pops the ‘p’. There’s another rustle, and a muffled chuckle.

“Do you want to hang out Saturday?” Jonathan asks shyly.

A smile slowly breaks across Steve’s face.

“Yeah,” he nods. “I can pick you up, and we can go get burgers or something… oh! And you can bring the photos you promised you’d show me!”

“Oh right,” Jonathan chuckles. “I forgot about that… but yeah, I can bring them. Do you have a pen though…? I want to give you my address so you don’t have to go looking for it.”

“Give me a minute--” Steve says, standing up and turning around. He digs through the growing pile of mail for a pen or pencil. A pen is buried under some bills, so steve grabs it and some random envelope

to write on.

“Okay, got one.” He wedges the phone between his cheek and shoulder, bending over a bit to write on the table.

Jonathan rattles off the address. He has to repeat it a few times for Steve, but Steve gets it written down eventually.

“Does eleven on Saturday sound good?” He asks, setting the pen back in the pile of mail.

“Sounds great.” Jonathan says. “See you then?”

“Yeah, yeah, of course.” Steve nods. He looks down at the address written on the back of the envelope. There’s a little smile on his face.

They talk for another minute before hanging up. Steve set the phone in its cradle, looking down at the envelope on the table. He picks it up, carefully holding it in his hands-- as if one wrong move will turn the paper to dust. He cracks a smile, a little aware of the fact that he might look like an idiot.

He doesn’t notice his father has looked up from the TV. He’s staring at his son with a look of distaste.

6. midwest shooting star

Notes for the Chapter:

> this chapter got real long real quick lmao but it's mostly dialogue hahaha
> (chapter title comes from 'avalanche' by walk the moon)

Steve honks the horn, letting Jonathan know he's there. He's sitting in his car, in the Byers' driveway. The radio's softly playing some rock song, filtering in through the speakers with little bursts of faint static. The only good station is in Indianapolis of course.

The front door swings open, and Steve looks up. Jonathan steps out, bundled up in his usual jean jacket and his bag slung over a shoulder. He waves a little as he shuts the door. Steve waves back, watching him cross the porch and then the driveway.

Jonathan opens the passenger door, getting in and dropping his bag by his feet.

"Sorry I was a little late," Steve says. He puts the car in reverse, swinging it around to drive back down the dirt path to the main road. "I got a little lost."

Jonathan sheepishly smiles. "Yeah… A lot of people do…"

"It's cool," Steve assures him. "It's kind cool to have a house out here. Tons of privacy out in the woods."

"I don't know," Jonathan shrugs. "Some find it creepy. But I like it, I guess."

"That's what matters, right?" Steve glances over at Jonathan, then looks back at the dirt road.

"I guess." Jonathan repeats.

The trees start to thin, and then they're back at the main road. Steve takes a right turn, heading in the direction of Benny's.

The visits to Benny's are starting to become a regular thing, Steve assumes. They're getting into the habit of both ordering the same thing and sitting on their respective sides of the booth. The waitress is starting to recognize them too.

It's becoming a lovely thing that Steve honestly looks forward to.

The waitress comes up to them after a few minutes. After ordering, she goes back into the kitchen and leaves the two of them alone.

"So you brought the photos, right?" Steve asks the second the door to the kitchen swings shut.

It's a quiet afternoon in the diner, so they're one of the only people here. Just a man sitting at a table by the window and another sitting at the counter. Quiet and peaceful; just how they like it.

Jonathan nods. He slides his bag into his lap, opening it to grab a thin photo album. He sets it on the table, pushing it across towards Steve. Steve takes it, looking at the cover. It's worn, fake red leather, with *'4th of July '83'* written on the cover in a messy scrawl with a black marker. Steve opens the cover, seeing the first photo.

It's of the whole Byers family. Jonathan, sandwiched by his younger brother and his mother. It's shaky, a little blurred, like one of them was trying to take the picture themselves.

"Your brother looks like you." Steve says with a little laugh.

Jonathan snorts softly. "My mom tells us that all the time."

Steve laughs again. Jonathan leans forward, resting his forearms on the table. Steve turns the album, so they can both look at it.

There are some fantastic photos. Jonathan's extremely talented. The vibrant fireworks have been captured perfectly. He makes such a simple thing look like an explosion of stars, bright color and light against the inky black sky. He can't believe what he's seeing.

"These are amazing…" Steve whispers. Jonathan shyly smiles. He

shifts in the seat, making it creak suspiciously.

“Thanks…” He trails off awkwardly, unsure of how to take the compliment.

“There aren’t a lot of you though.” Steve says as he turns to the next page.

There’s a mix of photos of the fireworks and ones of his family; Will and Joyce, as he has been informed. Will is smiling in all of them, even when the ice cream cone he holds has tilted and dripped onto the grass. Jonathan caught it in action; Will’s eyes were crinkled in up in a laugh as the ice cream precariously tips. There’s also some of Joyce, sitting on the corner of the blanket they had laid out in the grass. Jonathan got pictures of her face lit up by the fireworks, making her warm eyes sparkle.

“I like being behind the lens, I guess.” Jonathan shrugs. Steve flips to the next page, and cracks a smile.

It’s just Jonathan in this one. He’s smiling awkwardly, but looking cute anyways. The photo’s been taken at an angle and the lighting isn’t great. Steve assumes Will or Joyce had taken it.

“Oh,” Jonathan trails off. He bites his bottom lip for a second. He never really likes looking at pictures of himself. “Will insisted on taking it… but he’s not very good I guess.”

Steve doesn’t really understand the mechanics of a ‘ *good photo* ’, but he can kind of understand what Jonathan means. The flash is too bright, it’s a little unfocused, and not held straight.

Steve shrugs though. “It still looks good.”

He glances up at Jonathan, catching him smiling awkwardly and looking away. Steve chuckles, and flips to the next page. More pictures of fireworks. He flips to the next. Somebody must’ve passed out sparklers; Will’s waving it through the air as he runs. It’s a cute photo, and reminds Steve of those photos you’d see in a magazine or something… selling a classic childhood with its 4th of July festivities. Steve can imagine the smell of barbeque, the crackle of the fireworks,

and laughter as kids run through the grass.

Steve's never had that kind of holiday. Sure, he's lived in small enough towns to have a community fireworks show, but he never went. Nobody to go with really, and it's one of those things that isn't worth going by yourself.

As he stares down at the picture of Will and the sparkler though, it makes him feel like he has though.

He flicks to the next page; the last in the album. It's one of both Will and Joyce with sparklers. They hold the sparklers close, but not too close to burn anything. The white glow of the sparks lights their faces up in the night. It makes Steve smile.

"You have a nice family." He comments. He closes the album, and slides it back across the table.

Jonathan takes it, but doesn't put it away just yet. He holds it in his hands, smiling at Steve.

"Is that a compliment?" He raises an eyebrow.

"Yeah," Steve laughs and nods. "The three of you are really happy, and close."

Jonathan nods, and pulls his bag towards him. He slides the album back in his bag, then turns his attention back to Steve.

"I guess we are close…" Jonathan trails off. It sounds like there's more to be said, but the waitress is back with their food.

She sets the two plates on the table, rattling off which plate is which. It doesn't really matter, since their meals are identical. Steve and Jonathan take their respective plates though and start to eat.

"How did you do on the Algebra test?" Jonathan asks a few minutes after they've gotten their plates. He picks up a fry covered in chili and pops it into his mouth in one go.

Steve pulls a sour face. “I failed it.”

“I thought Nancy was helping you study.” Jonathan says after he chews and swallows.

“She is, and she’s a good tutor, don’t get me wrong... But I’ve never been good at math.” Steve shrugs. Jonathan presses his lips into a flat line.

“I can try to help,” He offers. “Maybe more help would work.”

Steve shrugs again. “We could try it, but I’m not sure it’ll work.”

“Humor me then.” Jonathan cracks a little smile. Steve looks up from his plate, seeing Jonathan’s smile and mirroring it. That sounded exactly like something Nancy would say. It’s pretty funny.

“Do you know Nancy? I mean, do you talk to her a lot?” Steve asks. Jonathan’s confused on where this is going. He shakes his head though.

“Not really. We have classes together, but that’s about it… why do you ask?”

“Because you two are a lot alike.” Steve chuckles. “I’ll invite you the next time the two of us study. You’ll see.”

Jonathan’s confusion must show on his face, because Steve laughs again.

“You’ll love her, I swear!”

The thought of someone else being there with him and Steve makes Jonathan a little upset. Not terribly so, but he likes it being just the two of them. He’ll let Nancy come though, since Steve’s close with her. From all that he’s said about her, she sounds nice.

That then leads to the other thought, or really series of thoughts. The first one is if he’ll be the third wheel, awkwardly sitting there as the two of them trade jokes comfortably. The second being if Steve and Nancy are in some kind of relationship that’s more than just friends. Steve’s never mentioned it though… But he doesn’t know why that

thought kind of makes his gut clench. He doesn't have a crush on Steve-- he swears-- but it could just be that weird pull Steve has. That vague, subtle glow his skin has, or the ethereal warmth to his eyes. Maybe it's that.

Jonathan decides to stick with that idea, not really wanting to follow this train of thought any more.

"What if she doesn't like me?" The second the question leaves his mouth, Jonathan realizes that it sounded kind of childish. Whoops.

"She'll like you," Steve assures him.

Jonathan quietly agrees, letting the topic shift to something else as they continue to their burgers and chili fries.

The waitress comes to clear their plates, but they don't leave immediately.

It's a slow afternoon, with half the tables empty. They can sit for a few minutes then.

"Do you want to go to the football game with me next Friday?" Steve asks, changing the topic without warning. "Nancy's watching her sister, and I've got no one else to go with."

Jonathan jolts a little. "Um… I've never been to one."

"Then you have to come with me!" Steve cracks a smile. "Friday night games are the pinnacle of the teenage experience Jonathan. You read enough books to know how societal experiences are stepping stones for teens."

Steve's definitely kidding, but it's amusing for Jonathan. He nearly laughs-- Steve sounded like he was repeating some English textbook analyzing teenage protagonists. But Jonathan keeps his composure and doesn't give Steve the satisfaction of that crappy try at persuasion.

"Those aren't the kinds of books I read." Jonathan rolls his eyes. "But

sure… I guess."

"Awesome!" Steve bounces a little in excitement. The booth creaks under him. Jonathan nearly rolls his eyes again.

"I don't understand football though. Like, at all," he admits.

His father had watched every game on TV, always insisting that Jonathan come watch it with him to have some 'father-son' bonding time. Jonathan had done everything he could to get out of it, but on the days where he had no excuse good enough, he wouldn't even be paying attention. He'd force himself to think about other things, since he'd rather be anywhere but sitting next to his half-drunk father with a beer and cigarette in hand as he yells along with the game.

"I'll explain it to you, how does that sound?" Steve offers, still smiling.

"Sure, I guess." Jonathan shrugs a shoulder. He doesn't know how he feels about sitting on the bleachers, surrounded by the classmates that hate him, and watching a game he knows nothing about. There are better things to be doing on a Friday night… but with how enthusiastic Steve is about this, he can't really say no.

For Steve, he doesn't think he could ever say no.

"Then it's a date! I can't wait." Steve's lips part in the smile, showing off perfect teeth.

It's a date .

Oh Lord Jesus, how Jonathan's heart flutters for a second. But he has to insist that it's platonic.

It's just platonic.

"Do you even know who we're playing against?" Jonathan coughs a little, swallowing his feelings.

"No clue. The Bulldogs.. Or something? I don't know what school." Steve shrugs, stirring the straw in his glass. The waitress hadn't cleared their drinks yet. Jonathan's is still half empty, while Steve's is

nothing but ice. As Steve stirs, the ice clinks against the side of the glass.

“Kirkwood Bulldogs.” Jonathan supplies. “They’re the next town over.”

Steve slowly nods. “Yeah, that’s it!”

“They’re our rival school.” Jonathan says. “So I guess the game will be packed.”

“It’s more exciting that way. More energy.” Steve grins.

Jonathan nods, even though that makes him feel uneasy. What if he’s squished between Steve and some other person? He doesn’t really want that. Well, pressed against Steve may not be so bad, but the other guy? Hell no. No physical contact with stranger allowed, please and thank you.

“Do you wanna get out of here?” Steve changes the topic once more.

“Where do you want to go?” Jonathan asks. He also starts to fidget with his drink, swirling his straw a few times.

Steve shrugs. “I don’t know… we could just drive around?”

“Alright,” Jonathan shrugs too.

Steve waves the waitress over, asking for their bill so they can leave.

They’ve been driving around for a little while, just chatting as Steve drives aimlessly. The conversation isn’t anything spectacular-- just talking about school and Steve’s latest problem with Billy Hargrove.

Jonathan sympathizes; shortly after Billy moved to Hawkins, he had a short-lived fascination with Jonathan. It was early freshman year,

and Billy kept bugging Jonathan and trying to take his camera. It hadn't lasted, maybe two weeks tops, before Billy had found someone else to pester. He wasn't amusing enough for Billy, Jonathan thought.

Steve thinks that story makes sense. Billy had laid eyes on him and then followed him like a hawk. Pretty soon, he guesses and hopes, Billy will be done with Steve and move on to torture someone else.

In the middle of their conversation, Jonathan glances at the clock on the dash, and jolts.

" *Oh shit--* "

"What?" Steve glances over at him, eyebrows furrowing in concern.

"I promised my mom I'd pick up Will." Jonathan runs a hand through his hair. "Fuck--"

"Relax," Steve cuts him off, somehow sensing Jonathan's growing anxiety. "We'll swing by and pick him up. I don't mind."

"Is that okay?" Jonathan asks.

"Yeah, of course." Steve glances over his shoulder, seeing if there's any cars behind him. No one's behind him, so he pulls a tight u-turn to go back in the direction of the Wheeler's house.

"We could always hang out at your place after dropping him off," Steve offers a few minutes later. Jonathan's eyes flick over to Steve.

"I mean… I guess we could." He says slowly. He's not sure how he feels about bringing Steve into his house. It's not the cleanest, and certainly not modern and beautiful like Steve's. Sure, he's never been inside the Harrington's, but judging by the outside, the house is modern masterpiece. His own is nowhere near that.

He bites his lip, looking back out the window.

"Cool," Steve cracks a smile, slowing the car down so he could turn into the cul-de-sac the Wheeler's house is in.

"Do you want me to go up with you?" Steve asks, stopping the car on

the curb in front of the house. He puts it in park, then turns his body to face Jonathan.

“If you want to,” Jonathan shrugs. “I’m just going to the door…”

“You got it then,” Steve nods once, still smiling. “I’ll keep it warm in here.”

Jonathan unbuckles his seatbelt, opening the door and stepping out. Steve watches him go-- he crosses the lawn and steps up onto the porch. He knocks, and five seconds later the door opens.

It’s Mrs. Wheeler, with a megawatt smile. Her smile is big and fake, making Jonathan’s stomach roll a little.

“Hello Mrs. Wheeler,” he calls her by her formal name instead of her insistence on calling her Karen. “I’m picking up Will tonight.”

She nods, disappearing into the house to get Will from the basement. Jonathan loiters on the porch, deciding its best to just stand there.

He glances over his shoulder, looking at Steve through the window. Steve’s eyes are elsewhere. Although a second after Jonathan looks at him, Steve’s eyes meet Jonathan’s; like he could feel a pair of eyes on him. One corner of Steve’s lips quirks up.

Jonathan feels that kind of joy like the sun breaking through the clouds after weeks of gray skies.

Footsteps coming thundering down the hall, and Jonathan’s attention is drawn away from Steve. Will and Dustin are stomping down the hall. Dustin looks a little peeved to be leaving, but he sees Jonathan and holds his hand up for a high five.

“How you doin’?” Dustin grins. He’s been grinning a lot more lately, since his front teeth are finally growing in. So far, they’re just little white tips poking out from his gums, but it’s exciting nonetheless.

“Good,” Jonathan laughs a little, returning the high five. Dustin keeps grinning as he shoves his feet in his shoes, which had been kicked into the pile of the other boy’s shoes that sat next to the door.

Will dug his out from the pile and spent a little more attention in putting them on than Dustin had.

“Steve’s driving so you two are in the back.” Jonathan says as the two boys tie their laces.

“Steve?” Dustin glances up, looking confused.

“Harrington.” Will finishes for Jonathan. “He’s Nancy’s friend. He just moved here.”

Dustin’s lips form an ‘o’ as he nods.

The two finish getting their shoes on. Jonathan gestures for them to go out to the car. Dustin and Will step off the porch, and begin to cross the lawn. Jonathan closes the door behind him, and follows them to the car.

Steve’s still got that half smile on his lips as the boys throw open the back door. They clamber in and Jonathan takes the passenger seat once more.

Immediately, the two boys are talking about their latest DnD quest. They’re rattling off stats of some enemy and discussing tactics to defeat it.

Steve chuckles softly, glancing over at Jonathan. Jonathan’s just as amused by it.

“Okay, I’m gonna need an address.” Steve says as he pulls the car away from the curb. His voice has to be loud enough to cut through the chatter.

Dustin gives him a house number and street name. Steve just looks at Dustin through the rearview mirror, completely confused.

“Okay, I don’t know where that is,” Steve admits, making the boys in back laugh.

“I’ll tell you,” Jonathan assures him. He knows that if he doesn’t, Dustin will be too deep into the conversation with Will to do it.

“Thanks.” Steve smiles at him for a second before turning his attention back to the road. The first turn is a left, spoken softly by Jonathan.

For a few minutes, the boys chatter in the back seat and Jonathan directs Steve on where to go. Between the two separate conversations, the radio is drowned out.

“So where’d you move from?” Dustin asks suddenly, leaning forward and butting in between the front seats.

“New York City,” Steve says.

They’re driving through the heart of town, heading towards Dustin’s neighborhood that lies just beyond the high school and middle school.

“Wow, sucks that you ended up here.” Dustin snorts.

“It’s not too bad,” Steve shrugs. He glances over at Jonathan, meeting the other’s eyes for just a second before his eyes turn back to the road.

Jonathan cracks a smile, and turns his eyes back to the window.

“I’ve lived in the midwest before,” Steve says. “It’s not really a big deal.”

“I guess, but like… It’s a *shithole* here man,” Dustin sighs heavily.

“Language,” Jonathan says absently.

Dustin rolls his eyes, making Will laugh a little. Jonathan presses his lips into a flat line, holding in a sigh. He glances out the window, and realizes they’re coming up to Dustin’s street. He points out what street to turn on, and Steve nods.

They turn onto Dustin’s street, and right on the corner is the Henderson household. Steve slows the car to a stop, and puts a hand on the back of Jonathan’s seat. He twists back to look at Dustin.

“It’s been a pleasure driving you Dusty,” Steve grins.

Dustin groans as he unbuckles his seatbelt. “Stop-- you’re not my mom, don’t call me Dusty.”

“Whatever you say Dusty!” Steve laughs as Dustin throws open the door.

With one foot out, Dustin sticks his tongue out at Steve. The three in the car laugh, and Dustin swings the car shut so hard the car shakes.

“Hey! Treat her with care!” Steve yells, even though all the windows on the car are closed. The two are still laughing when Steve sits back normally. Steve huffs, and glares at Jonathan. He’s mostly being overdramatic, and yanks the gear shift to put the car in drive.

“Whatever, just tell me how to get to your house.”

The second the car’s parked, Will’s out and bustling up the stairs to the front porch.

Jonathan takes his time, unbuckling his seatbelt and picking up his bag from its spot at his feet.

“So, will I be seeing you in the dark room on Thursday?” Steve asks, raising an eyebrow.

Jonathan looks over, one hand resting on the door handle.

“Yeah,” he nods. “But I’m still warning you that it’s not as exciting as you think it’s going to be.”

Steve shrugs. He shifts in his seat.

“So? It’s gotta be more fun than sitting alone at home.”

He had a point there. Jonathan shrugs too, and opens the door.

“I’ll still see you at lunch on Monday.”

“Of course.” Steve cracks a smile. Jonathan glances over after stepping out of the car. He cracks a smile too. They hold the eye

contact for a few seconds before Jonathan shuts the car door. He crosses the front of the car, stepping into the headlights. His shadow moves across the garage doors, then disappears as he leaves the light.

Steve watches him walk; all the way up until the front door shuts behind Jonathan.

Then, he puts the car in reverse, and goes home.

Notes for the Chapter:

> motivation for this fic tanked so that's why i haven't updated in weeks. whoops. i've just had a ton going on in my life. it's a mix of good and bad, but more good than bad at least.

Author's Note:

> Hit me up on tumblr for updates and extra bits about this fic!! I'm trying to be more active on my writing blog, and there's a lot going on behind the scenes of this fic haha
>
> (story title comes from 'run away with me' from carly rae jepsen)